

**DECISION NOTICE
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**Forest Roads 316 and 625 Improvements
Environmental Assessment**

**Mogollon Rim Ranger Districts
Coconino County, Arizona**

Introduction

An environmental assessment (EA) has been completed for the widening, re-aligning, and paving of two National Forest Roads that provide access to Private land developments. This decision includes: widening and paving of Forest Roads 316 and 625 into Clear Creek Pines 3&7 and Clear Creek Pines 4, 5, & 6, respectively, to meet County Road Standards, re-aligning Forest Road 625 to make a more safe intersection with State Highway 87, and providing a safe place for the school bus to turn around near the entrance to Clear Creek Pines 3&7.

The EA and the Project Record is available for review at the Blue Ridge Ranger Station, 60 miles south of Flagstaff, AZ on State Highway 87.

Decision and Rationale

Based on the Environmental Assessment for this project, as well as comments received during the 30-day public comment period for the completed EA, it is my decision to select Alternative 1 for implementation. Alternative 1 emphasizes improvements that are the most beneficial in achieving the purpose and need.

The purpose of the proposed road improvement projects is to facilitate minor reconstruction and long term, cost effective, maintenance of Forest Development roads that are under a Maintenance Agreement and Special Use Authority with Coconino County Public Works Department. This proposal would address Coconino County's needs to:

- Bring both FDR 316 & 625 to current ADOT standards, which includes meeting Coconino County & State Safety Standards for 28 foot road widths, wider and well drained road beds, school bus turn-around and safe entrance for 625/SR87 interchange.
- Reduce airborne dust created by residential road travel to meet ADEQ air quality standards.
- Create a cost-effective solution for routine road maintenance.

Alternative 1 is superior to Alternative 2, "no action" because it provides for much-needed improvements as described in Chapter 1 – Purpose and Need. The current drainage ditches are inadequate for the wet weather conditions; current road width on both FDR 316 and 625 is 20 feet, which does not meet the County's Engineering Design and Construction Criteria. There is a blind curve as FDR 625 enters SR87 limiting visual sight distance for traffic either entering the highway or

turning onto FDR 625. There is no school bus turn-around, and there are high levels of fugitive dust along these roads, plus existing maintenance costs for FR316 and 625 are significantly higher than other roads within the County network.

Alternative 3 only addresses the dust issue along these roads by applying dust palliative. None of the other safety issues or maintenance costs are addressed in this alternative.

Alternative 4 probably addresses the purpose and need far better than Alternatives 2 and 3 but not as completely as Alternative 1 – Proposed Action. Alternative 4 addresses most of the concerns with the exception of paving Forest Roads 316 and 625 with no deceleration lane leading into FR 625. Alternative 4 does not address the dust issue nor the safety issue relative to egress and ingress to SR87 from FR 625. This alternative does not fully satisfy the Purpose and Need for safety.

During the scoping period in May 2001 the proposed action included a school bus turn-around for Clear Creek Pines 8 & 9. That specific action was not carried forward into detailed analysis in the draft environmental assessment. Coconino County decided that they would not pursue that action at this time. If the school district and local residents demonstrate a need for a bus turnout in the future then it will be addressed at that time.

Description of the Selected Alternative (Alternative 1)

This decision will authorize the County to make the following improvements:

FDR 316 into CCP 3 & 7:

- FDR 316 from SR87 to the private property at CCP Units 3 & 7 will be widened to 28 feet.
- Drainage structures, such as culverts, ditches and run-outs will be installed, constructed or reconstructed as necessary to create better drainage.
- 1.5 miles will be paved with asphalt.
- A graveled school bus turnabout will be constructed on National Forest land adjacent to the subdivision boundary using the junction of 316/316A.
- A limited number of small diameter trees will be removed to accommodate the widening and drainage improvements.

FDR 625 into CCP 4, 5, & 6:

- FDR 625 from SR87 to the private property at CCP Units 4, 5, & 6 would be widened to 28 feet.
- Drainage structures, such as culverts, ditches and run-outs will be installed, constructed, or reconstructed as necessary to create better drainage.
- 1.1 miles will be paved with asphalt.
- The FDR625/SR87 intersection will be re-aligned to provide access onto a straight section of SR87.
- 190 total Ponderosa Pines, 5 of which are over 24" in diameter, will be removed to accommodate the widening, re-alignment and drainage improvements. 84% of the trees to be removed are less than 6" in diameter. This is based on tree surveys performed as part of the roadway realignment design as displayed in Appendix B. [PR #17]
- Approximately 2200 feet of former roadbed will be closed, rehabilitated and seeded with native grass seed.
- A deceleration lane will be constructed for westbound highway traffic turning north onto FDR 625.

There will be approximately 15 merchantable Ponderosa pine trees that will be removed to facilitate the realignment. These trees will likely be sold to and removed by a logging company. The remaining Utah and alligator juniper and gambel oak may be cut and removed by the local public who have in their possession a current fuel wood permit.

Mitigation

Mitigation actions required to implement Alternative 1 are outlined in the EA, Chapter 2 - Alternatives. These actions include:

- Implementing soil and water mitigations such as installing drainage structures and culverts in roads to reduce concentration of water runoff.
- Seeding and mulching slopes where necessary with approved weed-free mixtures and implementing Best Management Practices for Noxious/Invasive Weeds.
- Storm Water Pollution Protection Plans will be required of all contractors prior to beginning construction on any portion of the project that will disturb existing native soils and/or vegetation.
- If previously undocumented prehistoric or historic archaeological sites are encountered during the course of the project or if significant subsurface cultural deposits are found at site AR-03-04-07-116 or AR-03-04-07-117, project work in the area will stop until a formal evaluation of the deposits is conducted by a District or Forest Archaeologist.
- County Engineer approves Traffic Control Plan (T.C.P.) prior to start of construction.
- A County Sign Plan will provide signage to match new road conditions.
- Additional enforcement may be needed to reduce speeding or the addition of speed humps or other traffic calming measures if studies indicate the need.

Monitoring

Monitoring required to implement Alternative 1 is outlined in EA, Chapter 2 – Alternatives and include the following

- Post-project monitoring for noxious weed introduction will be done at the beginning of the new growing season
- Place traffic counters capable of measuring speed will be placed on the pavement near subdivision entrances after pavement is installed. Results from these speed studies will be used to design appropriate mitigation measures, if needed. Mitigation measures may include speed humps, or other such traffic ‘calming’ measures.

Public Involvement

An integral and ongoing element of the environmental analysis is contact with the public. Scoping was used early in this process to identify the issues to be addressed and the depth of the analysis required for the Environmental Assessment.

On May 15, 2001, scoping letters were sent to local residents describing the proposed action.

Three issues of concern were raised by the public and were carried forward into alternatives.

Issue Number 1: Adding pavement will increase traffic and therefore decrease security is addressed in the Public Safety section.

Issue Number 2: Adding pavement will increase speeds. This issue is addressed in the Public Safety section.

Issue Number 3: There may be increased maintenance costs due to adding pavement. This issue is addressed in the Economics section.

The Forest Roads 316 and 625 Improvements Environmental Assessment was completed and made available for public comment for 30 days ending November 10, 2003. The public's responses to the environmental assessment were evaluated and the Forest Service responses are included in Appendix A of the EA.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative #2 (No Action):

This alternative serves as a baseline with which the proposed action is compared and is a requirement of NEPA [40CFR 1502.14 [d]].

Under this alternative, none of the proposed action elements would be implemented and routine maintenance would continue to be done as it is currently.

Alternative #3 (Maintenance with a dust palliative, but no widening/straightening):

This alternative was generated to address concerns relative to decreased security that may result from increased traffic due to paving.

Alternative #4 (Widening FDR 316 and widening and straightening FDR 625; dust palliative on the road surfaces):

This alternative addresses the issue of safe ingress and egress to SR87 from FDR 625, and addresses air quality and drainage improvement issues as well.

Alternatives Considered But Eliminated From Detailed Study

During scoping, the interdisciplinary team considered another alternative and determined that it would not be carried forward into detailed analysis. The following summarizes that alternative, with reasons why it was dropped from further study.

Specific to FRD 625, (re-align and widen but don't pave):

ADOT requires that all constructed entries onto State Highways be paved within their (ADOT's) R-O-W. Paving only the portion of the road within the ADOT R-O-W would create unnecessary additional construction costs to mobilize paving equipment and crews to a remote location for a very small quantity of work. Maintenance costs would increase because there would be two separate surface types to maintain.

Finding Of No Significant Impact

I have determined through an environmental assessment that Alternative 1 is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general vicinity. This determination is made considering significance in both context and intensity (40 CFR 1508.27).

Context

I have determined that Alternative 1 is a site-specific action that by itself does not have international, national, region-wide, or statewide importance. The discussion of the significance criteria that follows applies to the intended actions and is within the context of local importance in the area associated with the Mogollon Rim Ranger District.

Intensity

Beneficial and Adverse Impacts:

The physical and biological effects are confined to the immediate area of Forest Roads 316 and 625 and State Route 87.

Public Health and Safety:

Given the current and expected numbers of people recreating and particularly traveling in and out of Clear Creek Pines Units 3 & 7 and Units 4,5 & 6 and the mitigation measures prescribed to reduce potential conflicts, there are no known or expected adverse effects on public health and safety.

Implementing Alternative 1 will not disproportionately impact any minority population in the immediate area or surrounding counties.

Unique Characteristics:

This project area is not in proximity to any unique historic sites, parklands, prime farm land, wetlands or ecologically critical areas.

Controversy:

The environmental effects to the human environment are documented in the environmental assessment and are typical for the action proposed. The effects are not controversial from a scientific or technical standpoint.

Uncertainty and Risk:

The actions also do not involve unique or unknown risks, nor are the environmental effects highly uncertain. The activities are typical of past activities in the vicinity. To the best of my knowledge, the effects of activities are known and have been addressed.

Precedent:

Implementing Alternative 1 does not set a precedent for future actions that would have significant effects.

Cumulative Effects:

The cumulative effects are addressed in the EA, and the analysis team evaluated the projects listed on the current Schedule Of Proposed Actions (SOPA) for the Coconino National Forest for potential impacts of reasonably foreseeable action. There is not a significant cumulative effect to the environment, or to the economy of the project region or Nation, from implementing Alternative 1.

Significant Scientific, Cultural or Historical Resources:

Implementing Alternative 1 will not cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural or historical resources. An Archaeological Survey and Cultural Resources Clearance report for the Forest Roads 316 and 625 Improvements project area is complete and available for review in the Project Record. The State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with a determination of No Adverse Effects for implementation of the projects.

Threatened and Endangered Species or Critical Habitat:

Implementing Alternative 1 will have no significant effects on threatened, endangered, candidate or proposed species or Forest Service listed sensitive species, and is not likely to destroy or adversely modify proposed critical habitat of any species. A Biological Assessment and Evaluation is complete for all threatened, endangered, candidate and sensitive species occurring within or adjacent to the Forest Roads 316 and 625 Improvements project area.

Federal, State and Local Laws:

Implementing Alternative 1 does not threaten a violation of Federal, State or local laws, or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Consistency

The actions planned under this decision are consistent with the management direction in the Coconino National Forest Land Management Plan, and with Forest Service direction and policy.

Implementation Date

This project will not be implemented sooner than five (5) business days following the close of the appeal filing period established in the Notice of Decision in the *Arizona Daily Sun*. If an appeal is filed, implementation will not begin sooner than 15 calendar days following a final decision on the

appeal if the decision is upheld. Implementation means actually doing the ground disturbing activities described in this notice. Preparation work may proceed.

Appeal Procedures and Administrative Review Process

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR 215.3. A written notice of appeal must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer:

Regional Forester
USDA Forest Service
Southwestern Region
333 Broadway Blvd., SE
Albuquerque, NM 87102

The Notice of Appeal must be filed within 45 days of publication of notice of this decision in the newspaper of record, the *Arizona Daily Sun*. Appeals are also being accepted through the electronic inbox at appeals-southwestern-regional-office@fs.fed.us.

In accordance with 36 CFR Section 215.14, it is the responsibility of those who appeal a decision to provide the Appeal Deciding Officer sufficient evidence and rationale to show why the Responsible Official's decision should be remanded or reversed. The written notice of appeal must meet the following requirements:

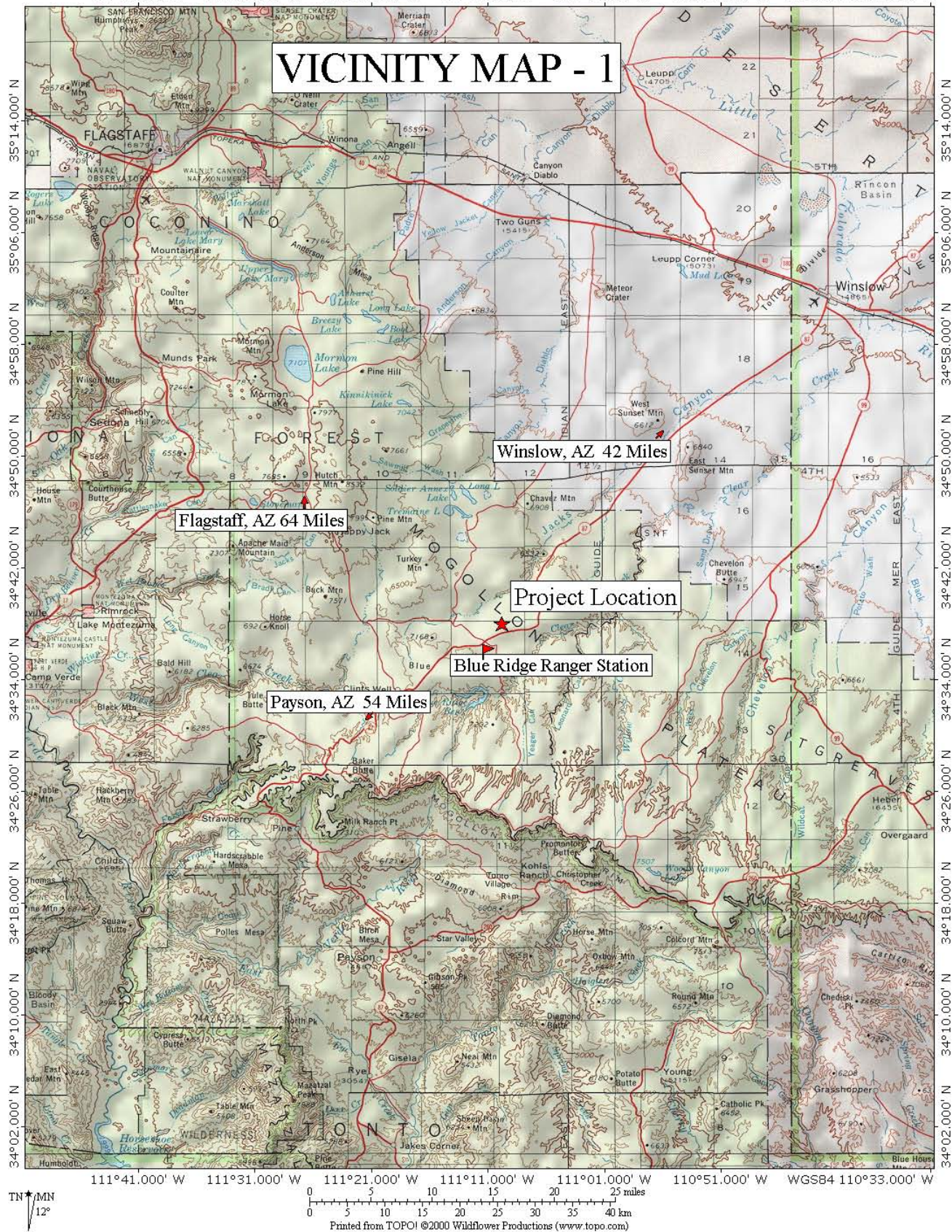
- List the appellants name, address and telephone.
- Identification of lead appellant when multiple names are included.
- Identify the decision document by title and subject, date of decision, and name and title of the Responsible Official.
- The regulation under which the appeal is being filed.
- Identify the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks or portion of the decision to which the appellant objects and rationale for those changes.
- State why the appellant believes the Responsible Official's decision failed to consider the substantive comments.
- State how the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation or policy.

Contact Person

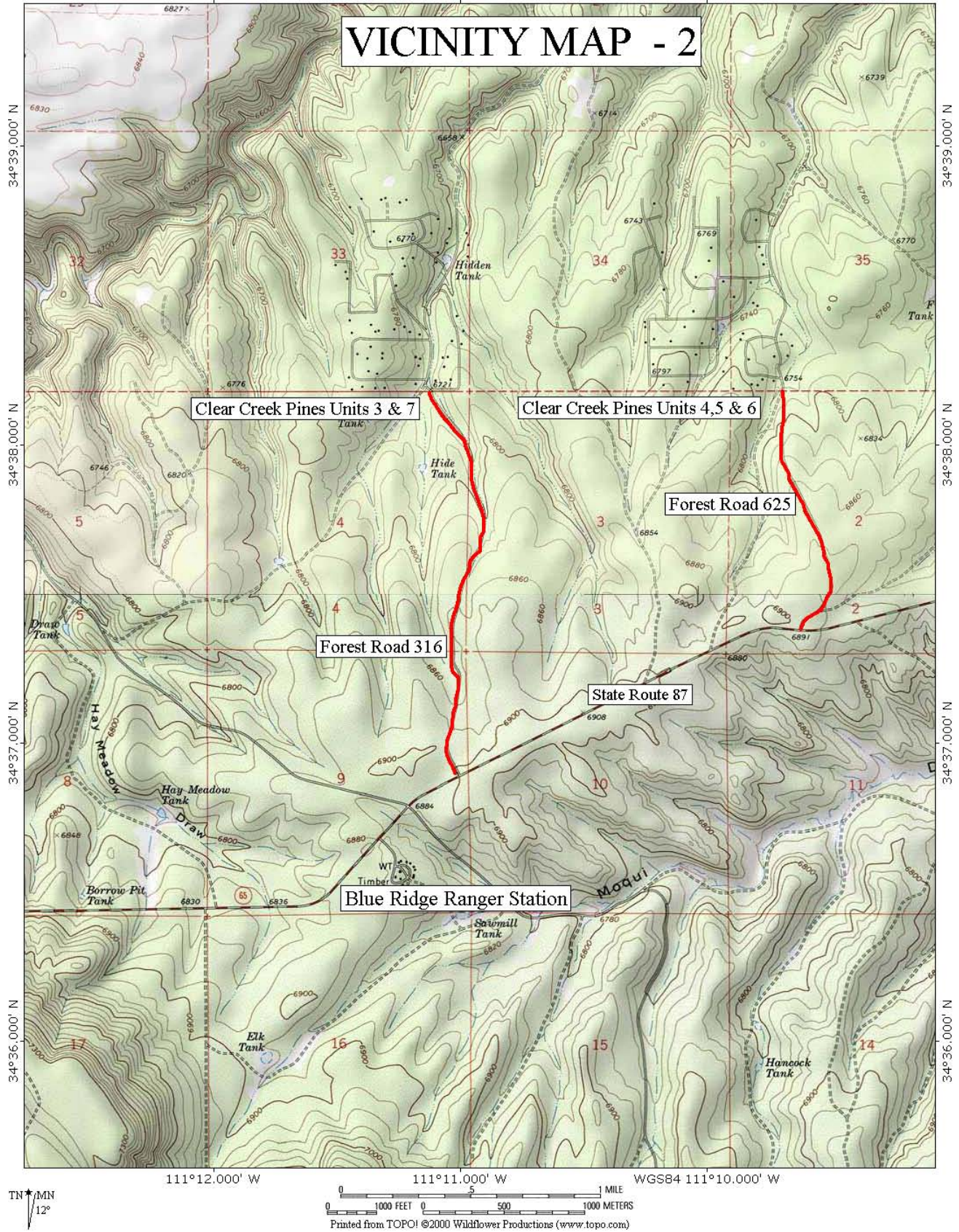
For additional information concerning the decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Carol Holland, Planning Staff; Mogollon Rim Ranger District; HC31 Box 300; Happy Jack, AZ 86024 or by telephone at (928) 477-2255.

/s/ NORA B. RASURE
Forest Supervisor

Date 12/30/2003



VICINITY MAP - 2



111°12.000' W

111°11.000' W

111°10.000' W

WGS84 111°09.000' W

PROPOSED ACTION - MAP 3

34°39.000' N

34°39.000' N

34°38.000' N

34°38.000' N

34°37.000' N

34°37.000' N

34°36.000' N

34°36.000' N

111°12.000' W

111°11.000' W

111°10.000' W

WGS84 111°09.000' W



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